



Friendship, Dating and Family

Teens today live in a world where having a boyfriend/girlfriend is a symbol of popularity, and sometimes, in their minds, the only thing that makes them feel loved. Studies have shown that a young person's sense of self-worth is very fragile and tied to how others perceive them rather than to an awareness of God's incomparable and eternal love for them. Hence the vital importance of healthy relationships.

A New "Dating" Paradigm

In an age now long past, before the invention of the automobile, it was customary for a man to "court" a woman in the presence of her family, with the hope of one day marrying her. Today, with easy access to cars – not to mention continual developments in social media – the family has been pretty much cut out of the dating scene. Dating as courtship, as a mature prelude to marriage, is seen as quaint and outmoded. It has been replaced by dating as recreation, starting in the early teens – or even pre-teen. But if a teen dates for recreation, he or she is just training in the habit of revolving relationships. These tend to lead to soap opera dramas and emotional "divorces." Teen infatuations can seem to relieve a craving for personal attention, especially when this is marketed to young people by social media, movies, and television (especially "reality TV"). The false message is "personal attention = importance." Sadly however, statistics show that the earlier a person begins dating, the more likely they are to become involved in sexual behavior, which is a recipe for disaster.

How important it is, then, for teens to learn to relate to the opposite sex as friends, which gives them more of a chance to discover their independence, identities, goals and dreams. And so it is generally better for teens to gather in groups, which is fun and wholesome and doesn't carry the same degree of risk as the one-on-one dating scene.

Planning for Success

Ten suggestions on how to keep relationships pure are offered in the Parent's Guide on pages 92-93. Finding happiness through purity is not about merely saying "no" to sexual activity, but about saying "yes" to love. Teens can enjoy good friendships, while preparing for a future of joy and romance without regret.

Living the Truth

When we learn to live faithfully and to love rightly, we will have peace as we discern God's path for us. Our relationship with Christ must be the foundation on which our lives are built.

"To succeed in this demanding project of life, continue to listen to God's Word, draw strength from the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Confession. The Lord wants you to be...builders of a new humanity" (Pope Saint John Paul II, World Youth Day Message).

Questions to engage with your son/daughter

1. What was the most important thing you learned from this Theology of the Body program? Why?
2. What is difficult in living out the teachings of the Theology of the Body? How can I support you?